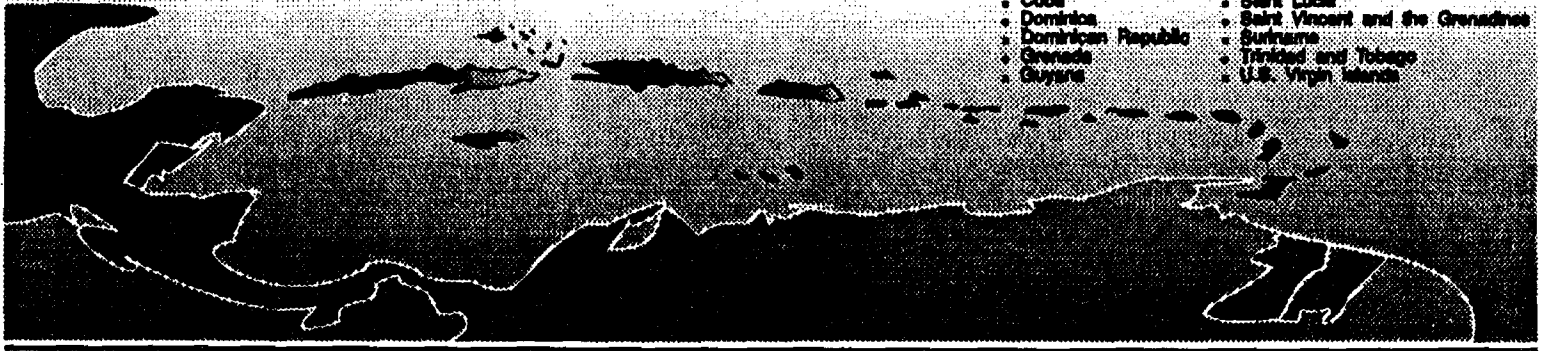




- Antigua and Barbuda
- Aruba
- Bahamas
- Barbados
- Belize
- Br. Virgin Islands
- Cuba
- Dominica
- Dominican Republic
- Grenada
- Guyana
- Haiti
- Jamaica
- Montserrat
- Netherlands Antilles
- Puerto Rico
- Saint Kitts and Nevis
- Saint Lucia
- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- Suriname
- Trinidad and Tobago
- U.S. Virgin Islands

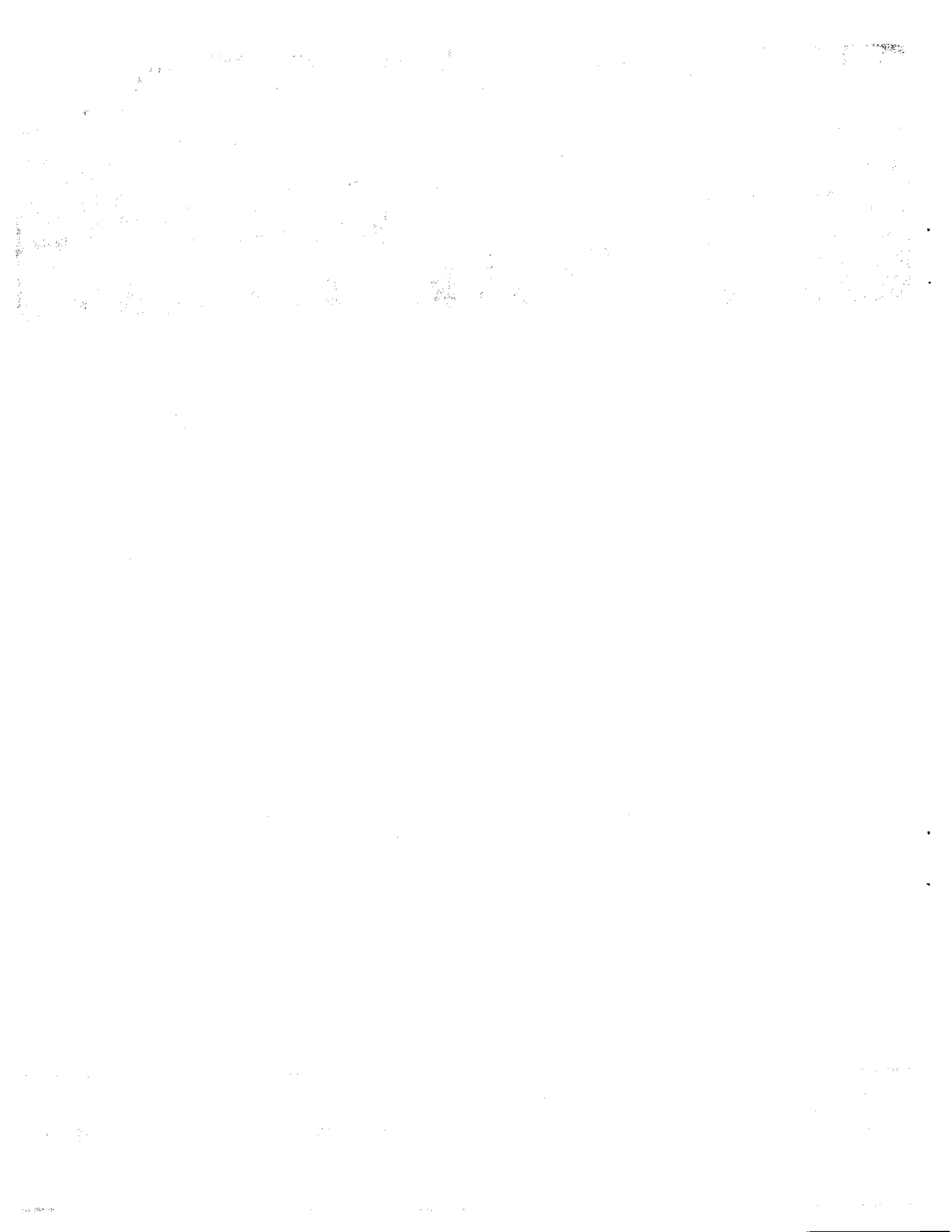


Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on
 Men and Women in Changing
 Caribbean Social Structures
 Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
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REPORT OF THE AD HOC EXPERT GROUP MEETING
 ON MEN AND WOMEN IN CHANGING CARIBBEAN SOCIAL STRUCTURES:
 Framework for discussions on the relationship between
 men and women in changing Caribbean social structures





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1. Introduction

The United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace 1976-1985, has triggered world-wide activities aimed at focusing global and national attention on the advancement and promotion of women. Women, their contribution and participation to the entire development process have become increasingly visible.

At the same time, some degree of insecurity has been growing among men within social spheres and in the nature of man-woman relations. It has also been observed that men are dropping out of labour and employment situations. The absence or retreat of the male from several areas of social production and reproduction is increasing and constitutes concern in Caribbean society. Data related to the field of education and training, implementation of family planning and family life education programmes support this trend. Meanwhile the region is experiencing increasing waves of violence often directed at women.

Gender analyses of access to education, enrolment in skills-training and skills-upgrading courses, levels of performance in Caribbean society show that females are advancing more than men in most instances.

Several countries in the region have implemented structural adjustment measures with varying results. However, in most cases the social fabric of Caribbean societies, has been severely affected. Economic dependence from the North continues albeit in different forms and new constellations of trading blocs are emerging.

The United Nations Decade for Women: Development, Equality and Peace has addressed a wide range of limitations of women in society and sparked off advancement for women in many areas of life. The changing condition of men in the new context is dangerously perceived by some as a result of this advancement. Analyses from different perspectives is important, as is the design and formulation of strategies for full attainment of equity in society.

2. Condition vs Position of men and women in society

Women's studies over the last two decades have presented a confusing, sometimes contradictory situation, as a result of the arbitrary use of terms and concepts to measure what was intended to be measured. Concepts such as status, situation, condition, position, have often not been defined or have been used in a mix. As a result, the concepts, as research tools have not produced the information which the research was looking for, in some cases. Several studies on women, for example, spoke of a focus on the *condition* of women, whereas in fact they studied the *position* of women. Therefore, it is important to make brief reference to the use of at least two major concepts in this context.

For the purposes of these notes, the term *condition* refers to the material status in which the woman finds herself: poverty, lack of education and skills, overburden of work. Much has been said on the condition of women over the past Women's Decade and beyond. Much action has been taken in the Caribbean to address various aspects of such conditions in the Caribbean as in the rest of the world. This has not been the case with regard to men.

Recent research and professional interventions show that men are in crisis at a very basic level, which is in terms of their sexuality. Whereas generally the introduction to sexuality of the female is guided, and systematically presented from a positive perspective, introduction to sexuality of the male usually comes in the "playboy" sphere, through pornography and similar sex books.

Similarly, much has been said and done in terms of the position of women in society. This has not been the case either with regard to men. The term *position* would refer to the social and economic placement of women as compared to men.

It is important to point out that whereas there is a case in terms of the condition of men in Caribbean society, which is a matter of widespread concern at the moment, it will be difficult to hold the view that there is a case in terms of the position of men. However, this may not apply in general terms. As in the case of women, the position of men needs to be analyzed from a class, gender, ethnic and racial perspective as well. More importantly, the position of either men or women can only be studied in relation to each other.

3. Irresponsible Men?

While in the Caribbean the phrase "irresponsible men" is associated with a lack of response on the part of fathers to the material needs of their offspring, in Latin America it is mainly associated with illegitimacy and abandonment of the family. As the nuclear family is the norm, the "disorganization" of the family is blamed upon such irresponsibility of men.

In the Caribbean, where the nuclear family structure is not the norm, the man has been termed by one author/researcher as the "passenging figure" (passagierende figuur, see Hoetink, 1959), who comes and goes and in a way, is a passenger in the house, when he is there.

In addition to the historical factor of enslavement, several factors, among which material constraints and a resultant image devaluation, tend to weaken the authority of fathers and husbands in the home. Loss of authority, control and respectability affects men terribly. It often leads to loss of a sense of self as well. In fact, one argument is that the very same social processes that give men power and privilege in a patriarchal society, cause men pain and hurt in addition to diminution and distortion of their human capabilities and capacities.

The Caribbean man escapes. He runs away from the obstacles to fulfill the expected obligations and avoids being confronted with his non-performance. He escapes to another woman and another home, he escapes to the street corner where he hangs out with the "boys", and/or he escapes to the rumshop. In middle class situations he may escape into his computer.

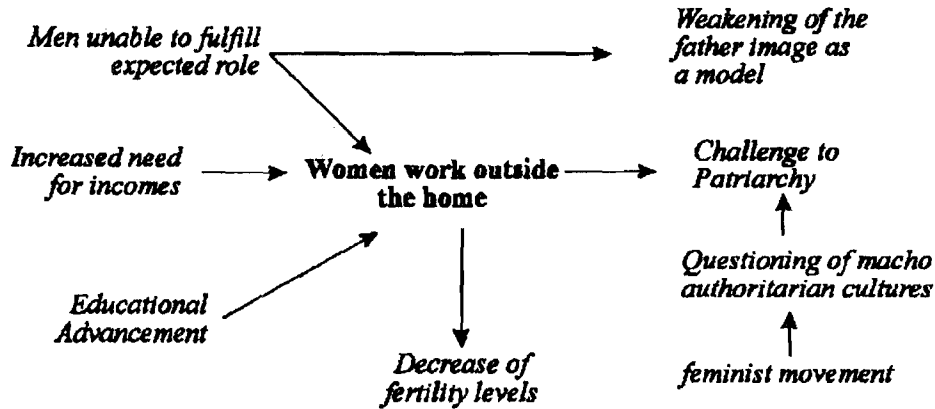
4. Modern Caribbean society

In modern Caribbean society young men hunt status symbols of the time. Their role models have model lifestyles which they also wish to follow: dress "to kill" in the latest fashion, drive fancy cars and "hang out" in expensive popular discos. In modern Caribbean society achievement and success are not linked to effort and performance does not pay.

Manifestation of power as they see it is not linked to concepts of responsibility and to the performance of duties. The use of power is not legitimate either. It is connected to violence. The image they have of their fathers or other male adults in the home is often that of a person who turns to domestic violence as he escapes eroded male authority.

Young people often have an inferior image of their fathers and of the adult male in general, compared to the image they have of their mothers. Women often have a similar image of their husbands or partners. The real behaviour of fathers and husbands does not respond to traditional father and husband figure. (Katzman, CEPAL 1992).

In modern Caribbean society various factors interplay to raise the perception of the non-performing male at risk.



5. Patriarchy

Patriarchal power is very difficult to comprehend as it involves everything. The institution of patriarchy has influenced the most fundamental notions of human nature and the relation between the individual and the universe as well. Patriarchy is the only system which up until very recently had never been challenged openly in history. Its doctrines have held such universal acceptance that they seemed to be the law of nature. In fact, they have often been presented as such.

Patriarchy is male domination of society. This domination is a structure of power and is said to have emerged from adaptive responses to ensure survival in society as it was organized. An important fact is that patriarchy is learned behaviour and we have learned that learned behaviour can be changed.

Today, however, the disintegration of patriarchy is imminent. The system of male domination is moving into decay, slowly but inevitably.

6. Feminism

The feminist movement - based on respect for differences - is one of the most spirited cultural currents of our time. Its ideas will have profound repercussions on our future evolution. Feminism is an expression of the transition to modernity. It has, in fact, emerged as part of modernity and at the same time in response to its entry, as from its inception feminism has criticized the old paradigms of action and knowledge while it has at the same time been under their influence. (Vargas, 1992)

As the confidence in institutions, political parties and the state, as vehicles for social change and transformation starts to weaken, feminism arises as one of the most integrated explanations of social reality, shaping itself as a political project which not only stands for the liberation of half of the world's humanity but also presents itself as a proposal for transformation of life on this planet.

7. Homogeneity and Differences

But we are not in post-patriarchy yet. All men and women are part of a male-dominated society. They belong to it as men and women irrespective of related factors relative to ethnicity, race, socio-economic groupings, sexual orientation and religion, etc. We cannot escape the ravages, conflicts and contradictions of patriarchal society.

The recent concern about men in danger has grown not only in terms of poor male participation, but particularly in terms of male performance. In a review and analysis of changing Caribbean social structures, in which perceived marginalization of the male is a concern, due attention should be given to the fact that men are not homogeneous neither are the women to whom they relate.

For more reasons than one the experience of men and women in the Caribbean is very specific. Similarly, masculinity and femininity are not homogeneous either and also need to be analyzed in relation to each other. In fact, gender relations include several masculinities and femininities. In terms of class, there is also the view that men of popular class backgrounds have been marginalized by the system. The whole organization of society, its production and reproduction, has endangered the marginal position of men in the social sphere. These men have responded to their exclusion by escaping the home. On the other hand, men of middle class backgrounds, equally marginalized by the system, have responded to their social marginalization by presenting themselves as tyrants in the home. Through their authoritarian and repressive behaviour in the household, they have cultivated the image of the father who everybody fears.

8. Power in the Caribbean

Caribbean (contradictory) experience of power is very specific. Shaped by enslavement and oppression, its reality confirms the heterogeneity of power. To further complicate matters, societies of oppression breed resistance to oppression, so that the history of oppression is also the history of struggle against oppression. This includes the creation of forms of personal power not valued by society.

9. A new Methodology

The quality of studies on the specific experience of different social categories or groups of people has improved significantly as a result of the methodological revolution caused by feminist research. The premise of "the personal is political", introduced by the feminist movement has impacted on social-science research in a positive way. The meaning of "the personal is political", is that the experience or situation of the individual person is not hers or his alone, it is the experience or situation of many others as well. Or, vice versa, the experience or situation of so many others is the experience or situation of the individual person as well. This implies that the researcher is both subject and object of study, rather than an impartial observer. In other words, the research must include the researcher. The results will necessarily be richer and close to social reality than if the individual researcher were not included. The importance of her/his inclusion is related to the fact that everyone has divergent placements in the hierarchy of power, (Kaufman, 1991).

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